

Corruption, Bribes, or Just Presents? The Practice of Offering Gifts in Ottoman-Hungarian and Ottoman-Romanian Relations*

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Abstract

Corruption was a well-known phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire, and it was widespread in many ways. It should be noted that the corruption shown in the so-called Ottoman royal mirror literature was one of the most important elements responsible for the decline of the empire. In recent decades, the “Ottoman Decline” paradigm has been largely rejected by the newer generation of historians, who have suggested a different “Transformation” paradigm. However, it does not appear that the phenomenon of corruption has been doubted.

Nonetheless, from both the great historical chronicles and the royal mirrors, as well as rarely recorded lawsuits, it appears that corruption was perceived as a serious problem even by Ottoman authors.

Besides Ottoman sources, Western diplomats and even ordinary people also refer to the occurrence of bribes. According to one point of view (one which I do not share) the use of Western sources for this phenomenon is misleading because they did not understand the inner workings of the empire. I am in favor of their use, but in all cases, they must be evaluated (where possible) according to the Ottoman circumstances, including the traditional redistribution structure of the Ottoman State, where the custom of donations differed from European customs of various times.

Key Words: corruption, bribes, gifts, Ottoman Empire, Hungary, Romania

Corruption was a well-known phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire, and it was widespread in many ways. It should be noted that the corruption shown in the so-called Ottoman royal mirror literature was one of the most important elements responsible for the decline of the empire (Kurt, 1994; Danişman, 1972; Howard, 2007). Koçi

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Bey mentioned in his *nasihat-nâme* (letter of advice = mirror of the prince) (Pala, 2006) that in the good old days (of Kanuni Süleymân), the appointment of officials was not dependent on bribes (Danışman, 1972: 7). In recent decades, the “Ottoman Decline” paradigm has been largely rejected by the newer generation of historians, who have suggested a different “Transformation” paradigm. However, it does not appear that the phenomenon of corruption has been doubted (Tezcan, 2010; Kafadar, 2003; Howard, 2007; Howard, 1988; Grant, 1999; Fodor, 1986).

Recent Turkish historical literature argues with the corruption thesis of the older historians, in particular Ahmed Mumcu (Mumcu, 1969). The critical attitude pursued by these historians concentrates on the issues concerning the process of using sources. This was also influenced by the impressions and critiques of contemporary European travelers and diplomats, such as Sir Thomas Roe (Roe, 1740), Stephan Gerlach (Gerlach, 2017; Beydilli, 1989),¹ Hans Derschwam (Babinger, 1923), etc. (Çelik, 2006). The amount of travel literature related to the Ottoman Empire is nearly infinite, so is it not possible to mention every important author. There is merit to the position of the more recent Turkish historians, which states that the Europeans were not able to differentiate between the various kinds of gifts (those given regularly and bribes). Despite this, I would like to emphasise that the historiography must not avoid using these sources. The published and unpublished diplomatic final reports and the dispatches of the permanent envoys are especially useful. This information comes from acquaintances of the European diplomats serving around the Porte, or via the Phanariot dragomans. These reports are full of descriptions of daily events in the Ottoman capital and are in most cases about negotiations with high-level Ottoman dignitaries, which usually took place in a clandestine manner. They provide a great deal of information about Ottoman policies and shared reports of direct bribery that cannot to be found in other Ottoman sources. For instance, the Habsburg resident envoy, Simon Reniger (1649-1664) (Cziráki, 2016; Papp, 2020a) visited one of the prominent Ottoman officials, the şeyhülislâm Esadefendizâde Ebu Said Mehmed Efendi, and handed over a very valuable gift to ensure the official's good will towards the Habsburg Emperor, Ferdinand III (1637-1657).² Reniger also reported that the former Grand Vizier,

¹ *Stephan Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch der von zween glorwürdigsten römischen Kaysern, Maximiliano und Rudolpho, beyderseits den Andern dieses Nahmens an die ottomanische Pforte zu Constantinopel abgefertigten und durch den Wohlgebornen Herrn Hn. David Ungnad, Freiherrn zu Sonnegk und Preyburg [...] mit würcklicher Erhalt- und Verlängerung des Friedens zwischen dem Ottomannischen und Römischen Kayserthum und demselben angehörigen Landen und Königreichen glücklichst-vollbrachter Gesandtschafft.* Hrsg. von Samuel Gerlach, Zunner, Frankfurt am Mayn 1674.

² Simon Reniger to Ferdinand III., Constantinople, 13. March 1652. Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (ÖStA), Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA), Staatenabteilungen, Türkei I, Kt. 125. Konv.1. 1652 (Jan-März) fol. 155-157.

Kara Murad (1649-1651) 1655), who had become the Imperial Admiral (kapudan paşa), purchased his protection through gifts handed over to the Valide Sultan, Hacı Turhan, the mother of Sultan Mehmed VI (1648-1687). An excellent example is Zülfikar Efendi, the thoroughly corrupt interpreter of the Hungarian language at the Porte. He argued with the Transylvanian envoys about the value of their (special) gift to the Grand Vizier, which was intended to guarantee his assistance in confirming the succession of the Transylvanian prince's son prior to the death of his father (the current prince). Confirming succession like this had not been customary, and Zülfikar openly demanded a large sum of money as a bribe for himself.³ He assisted in conducting the negotiations in the proper way until the prince's son was confirmed and his efforts were naturally honoured by the Transylvanians (I will revisit this issue at the end of the paper).⁴

Sometimes, the people of Istanbul objected to this corruption, which was not proven but was assumed to exist. It seems possible that in 1651, during the Candia War against Venice, the Venetians tried to use bribes to influence the Pashas of the Divan so the Ottoman fleet would not initiate any military operations that year. *“There is a rumour among the Turks that there is a bill of exchange of two times 100,000 cicines⁵ to corrupt the Turkish ministers [Pashas of the Imperial Council, or Divan, S. P.], so that they do not make any war preparations in the arsenal this year. By all accounts, not much would have been done despite this, since nothing has happened in the arsenal to date...”*⁶ Although this information comes from the resident envoy of the Habsburg Monarchy, Simon Reniger, it does not show any “Eurocentric criticism” of Ottoman corruption, (as is repeatedly shown in sources originating from Europe), since he had only relied on the collective assumptions of the people of Istanbul for information.

In addition to European reports, corruption is also mentioned in various Ottoman Chronicles and mirrors of princes. Perhaps one of the earliest documents, from the year 1480 (A.H. 885), forbids sanjak military recruiters from accepting gifts or bribes to allow people to avoid military service (İnalçık, 1987: XX; Çelik, 2006: 29). Some cases are also known where former divan secretaries produced forged documents of appointment for owners of Timars (Fodor, 2001).

³ Simon Reniger to Ferdinand III., Constantinople, Constantinople, 9. November 1652. HHStA Staatenabteilungen. Türkei I. Kt. 125. Konv.3. 1652 (Sept-Dez.) 123-128.

⁴ About the issue see: Papp, 2009; Papp, 2020b. About Zülfikár Efendi see: Kármán, 2018; Papp, 2020a.

⁵ Zecchino, pl. zechine: Venecian gulden, 3, 560. gramm. Langewiesche, 1981⁵, 109.

⁶ „Under den Türckhen gehet das geschrey herumben, es were ein wechsel von zwei mall 100.000 cikinen die türckhische ministros zu corrupieren, damit sie diß jahr in arsonal keine kriegs praeparatoria machen. Allem ansehen nach würdt man dessen ohne nicht vil darzue thuen, dan biß dato in arsonal nichts geschehen ist..” Simon Reniger an Ferdinand III., Constantinople, 6. November 1651. ÖStA, HHStA, Staatenabteilungen, Türkei I, Kt. 124, Konv. 2, fol. 18r–20r.; Papp, Cziráki, Tóth, and Szabados, 2018, 1443, Nr. 87.

The most important result of recent research is, on one hand, the attempt to differentiate between the various gift-giving habits, distinguishing which ones can be associated with corruption and which ones may have been occasional regular tributes. As a result, the most important types of gifts or tributes can no longer be considered formally to be tools of corruption, as previous historiography has supposed. Terms that are also associated with donation, such as in'âm (Karaca, 2007; Erünsal, 1981) and câ'ize (Doğan, 2002) (gift, present of honour), have nothing to do with corruption. The former term refers to donations by the Ottoman ruler to high-ranking dignitaries, while the second refers to the fee of appointment to the *reisülküttâb* on the occasion of the official inauguration. There are other examples of fees in the Ottoman state, for example there was a fee for issuing official appointment letters, *berât's* (*resm-i berât*), as well.⁷

Instead of mentioning all types of gifts, I would like to focus my research primarily on the gift form called *pîşkes* (*peşkeş*) (Kakuk, 1973: 327). My question relates to the way gifts were used in diplomatic relations (especially between Ottoman vassals and the Porte, with most of the information coming directly from Ottoman sources).

The most common term adapted to European languages is *bahşiş* (tip), which is comparatively less commonly found in Ottoman chronicles. The word used in the chronicles for a gift as a true bribe is the same as in modern Turkish: *rüşvet*⁸ (bribe, kickback). Although it was an accepted custom to give gifts, the former Grand Vizier Lütü Pasha (1539-1541) judged this type of gift (*rüşvet*) negatively in his *Asaf-nâme*: “*And he [the Grand Vizier] beware of letting them buy themselves off by gifts that come from crooks and thieves. The giving of bribes to dignitaries is an incurable disease; unless it be permitted to accept (gifts) from personal friends, from those who are accustomed to giving gifts [hedâyâ], from people who are able and do not need it. But otherwise beware of the bribe [rüşvet]! O my God, save us from it!*” (Tschudi, 1910: p. 13 German text, pp.12-13 Turkish text).

In the diplomatic sources, especially in the documents and registers (*defters*), the word *pîşkes* is frequently mentioned, and does not have an exact correspondence with corruption, but it is a non-tax, regular payment in cash or in goods. It seems that *pîşkes* existed from the very beginning of Ottoman history. It denoted the gifts that had to be given to superiors at certain festivities (Lambton, 1994; Maxim, 2001).

⁷ In the case of the Romanian voivodes: “*mu'tad üzere virilegelen câ'ize-i voyodalık*” (expense of voivodship, which is to be given according to the custom (my translation), see: Panaite, 1993).

⁸ Naîma Mustafa Efendi (2007). The word *rüşvet* is found 76 times in this work, according to the register. It seems to me that the word *rüşvet* was used several times in the Ottoman sources when someone had corrupted someone through money, and bribes of money did exist between Muslims.

This expression can always be found in the in‘am and ruūs defteris (Ahışalı, 2008) expressing whether or not a foreign envoy or ambassador presented a gift at the Ottoman court. Some months after a peace treaty between Hungary and the Ottomans in 1503 for instance, the Hungarian envoys presented pîşkeş (along with a letter from the king) as an honorary gift to Sultan Bayezid II.⁹ It seems that the expenses for the reception and accommodation of foreign envoys were financed by various mukata‘a (the farming out of public revenue) of Edirne (Gökbilgin, 2007²: 103-106, 109, 110, 248).

Since the ratifications by both sides of this peace treaty are available, it can be stated that gifts were most likely sent by both parties. According to the Hungarian (in Latin) and the Ottoman (in Turkish) versions of the document, the two rulers had equal rights. It is also worth mentioning that Hungary negotiated with the Ottomans not only in its own interests, but also for the other European countries, and this fact can be proved with the help of the texts of the treaties. In fact, the peace treaties between these two states were always bilateral until after the battle of Mohács (1526).¹⁰

It is important to mention as well, that the Hungarian legation delivered gifts again in the following two years, but none after March 1505. The registry notes in Persian draw attention to the fact that the Hungarians had stopped delivering gifts, e.g. from 1506, “Teşrif-i elçi-i krâl-i Üngürüs ki pîşkeş ne-âverd. (Honouring the Hungarian king’s envoy, who did not deliver any gifts.)”¹¹

In the Ottoman-Hungarian peace treaty of 1503, the word pîşkes was used again, but its meaning was a regular tribute payment. The two Romanian voivodeships, Moldavia and Wallachia had to pay this to the two neighbouring powers, i.e. the Ottomans and Hungarians, “sulha bile dâhil olub harâcların ve pîşkeşlerin şimdilik virügeldikleri üzre vireler ziyâde taleb u te‘addî olunmaya ve krâla viregeldükleri ‘adetlerin dahi vireler ziyâde taleb u te‘addî olunmaya. (The voivodes of Moldavia and Wallachia are also included in the treaty, their tributes and gifts must be paid as they are being paid now, no more may be desired or hostility shown. They must also provide to the King what they are accustomed to pay, more must not be desired, or hostility shown.)”¹²

⁹ “teşrif-i elçi-i krâl-i vilâyet-i Üngerüs ki pîşkeş mektûb âverd fi 10 minhu”. 10. Safer 910 / 23. June 1504) Atatürk kitaplığı, (İstanbul) Muallim Cevdet Yazmaları, Nr 0,71. 34b.; Gök, 2014.

¹⁰ Pray, 1765: 305; Katona, 1792: 345; Hammer-Purgstall, 1963²: 616-620; Noradounghian, 1897: 24, Nr. 118; Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (MNL) Országos Levéltár (OL) DL. 30498; Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi (TSMA) E. 7675.; ÖStA HHStA AUR 20 August 1503.; Noradounghian, 1897: 27, Nr. 137; Schimek, 1787: 198-198; Thallóczy and Horváth, 1912: 279-286; MNL OL. DL. 24393

¹¹ Atatürk kitaplığı, (İstanbul) Muallim Cevdet Yazmaları, Nr 0,71. *Ruznamçe Defteri*, p. 89a.

¹² TSMA E 7675 (15. Cemâzi‘ü l-evvel 909/ 5 September 1503); Anafarta, sine loco et anno: 11-12. Photos of the document in: Gökbilgin, 1958: Lev. III-XXII; Kütükoğlu, 1998²: 459-460.

It is not yet certain when Hungary really began to pay tribute and gifts after their defeat at Mohács (29 August 1526). It seems that after the second conquest of Buda (1529), when Sultan Süleymân I allowed King John Szapolyai to occupy the throne of Hungary, he accepted his annual tax obligation to the Porte in theory. Although the sources clearly state that the Hungarian envoys paid major sums to the Porte on several occasions in 1540, these were gifts rather than taxes. A document from the sultan provides indications that the tribute obligation was not fulfilled until October 1540, “sâl be-sâl hizâne-i ‘âmirime ‘âyid olacak emvâlûme dahi mütefekkil olub (‘since they are to be responsible for my tributes, which are to belong annually to my magnanimous treasury, ...)” (Schaendlinger and Römer, 1986: 3-4).

The first indication in official Ottoman documents that gifts and money were expected in addition to the tribute can be seen in an order of the sultan to István Majlád, who had requested that the sultan protect his position as voivode of Transylvania after the death of the Hungarian king, János Szapolyai. He was prepared to pay 25 thousand ducats annually as a tribute and 1000 ducats to each vizier (as a gift) if his request was granted (Papp, 2003: 162-164; Schaendlinger and Römer, 1986: 3-4). However, Majlád did not receive the title from the sultan, but was instead arrested by the Wallachians and the Ottomans in 1541 and was handed over to the sultan.

There was an official demand to receive gifts related to the Romanian voivodes, which was also stipulated in the appointment documents, “vilâyet-i mezbûreden tâ’yîn olunan haracları sâl be-sâl bî-qusûr ve lâ-kesür salihû l-vezin kâmil ayâr vak-tinde irsâl idüb ihmâlden hazer eyleye ve bundan gayrî virilügelen nesneleri dahi bî-qusûr vakit ile vire ve vüzerâ-i ‘izâm ve Rum-ili beglerbegisine ve sâyir erkân-i devlete sâl be-sâl virilügelen ‘âdet-i üslûb üzre her birine edâ ide. (The tributes appointed from the aforesaid land, thou shalt pay in due time from year to year without shortage and without defect in suitable weight and in excellent quality, thou shalt cease from carelessness. Moreover, thou shalt also deliver those things which were customary to pay, faultlessly and in due time, and give to my Grand Viziers and to the beylerbeyi of Rumelia and to the other Pillars of the State (i.e. Grand Dignitaries) annually to each one what is customarily given).¹³ As can be seen from the other two known imperial diplomas of appointment (berât-i hümayûn) concerning the Romanian voivodes, the gifts to the high-ranking dignitaries of the Porte were not specified: “qadîmden virilegelen nesnelere (The thing which has been customary to give since long ago)” (Ferîdûn, 1275²: 488-489). Unfortunately, the lack of sources in the case of Moldavia and Wallachia does not help to answer

¹³ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), İstanbul, Maliyeden Müdevver defteri 17932, pp. 11-12.; Maxim, 1974: 62-68, doc. 14; Maxim, 1994; Maxim, 1999a. Another berât with very similar content can be found in Bayezit Kütüphanesi (Elyazmaları Nr. 1970. 7v.-8r.) and was published in Romania by Gemil, 1981.

whether or not the gifts were regulated in the lost charters in the same way as the tribute. However, it is certain that the only known peace document from the reigns of Mehmed II (1444-1446, 1451-1481) and the Moldavian voivode Ștefan cel Mare (1457-1504) does not contain a word about gifts, even though it stipulated the payment of tribute. On the other hand, it does not prove that the Romanian voivodes did not pay gifts or any other form of *pîșkeș*. It has even been determined from Mihai Maxim's publication of sources that they did also provide *pîșkeș*, such as in 1526, when gifts were delivered to Edirne on behalf of the voivode of Moldavia, Ștefanița (1517-1527) (Maxim, 2001). Determining the quantity and the quality of the *pîșkeș* is a real challenge (Berza, 1957; Gemil, 1991: 211-219). In the case of the Romanian voivodes, there is no official list of the gifts or the amounts of money. The important information collected by Mihai Maxim shows that the act giving gifts was customary and seems to have been similar to those provided by Transylvania in the 16th and 17th centuries. Even without knowing of the precise amounts of the *pîșkeș*, it can be determined that the gifts included a sum of money, 16-20 horses and 20-70 falcons (*esb ve șâhin âverde*) (Maxim, 2001: 85, 89, 91, 92). The voivodes were also required to provide a large amount of salt along with the tribute (*cizye*) (Maxim, 1999b). Historians have used the news and reports of the foreign ambassadors to help to determine this. However, these documents do not always provide the correct information, and often overestimate the amounts. For instance, Hans Ludwig von Kueffstein, the Habsburg ambassador, reported on the circumstances of the appointment of the new Moldavian voivode, Alexandru Coconul (voivode of Walachia 1623-1627, voivode of Moldavia 1629-1632) in the final report of his mission to Constantinople dated 21 June 1629. "After the usual change in the Voivode of Moldavia on this day, which [would take place] every 6 or 5 years, one of the sons of former Voivode Radu, a 26-year-old young man [was appointed], who promised 360 thousand tallers for his appointment, whom I congratulated in this office through some of my servants and officers, and encouraged him to have a good relationship with his imperial majesty and other Christian dignitaries."¹⁴

There is significantly more data to be found in connection with the Transylvanian gifts, which were always delivered to the Porte together with the tribute. Previously, Derya Ocak analysed four lists of Transylvanian gifts from the second half of 16th century written in Latin and Hungarian (Ocak, 2016: 102). The first list

¹⁴ „Nachdeme auch dieser tagen die gewöhnliche Veränderung mit dem fürsten in der Moldau, so alle 6. oder 5. Jahre, zu weilen noch ehe beschickht, fûrgangen, vnndt eines vorin gewestes fürsten Radul Wayda Sohn, ein Junger herr, von 26. Jahren durch erlegung 360 m. taller Spaar erlanget, habe ich denselben, durch etliche meine Auffwarter vnd Officier, zu solche würde gratulieren, vnnd Ihne zu gueter Correspondenten mit Eur. Kay. May. Vnnd zu andern Christlichen Potentaten, ersucht lassen.” ÖSt HHStA Türkei I. (Turcica) Karon 111. Hans Ludwig von Kueffstein 1628-29. Finalrelation. fol. 45v.

was from the year of 1571, when the new voivode of Transylvania István Báthory (voivode and prince of Transylvania 1571-1586, king of Poland and grand duke of Lithuania 1576-1586) was appointed by the sultan (Papp, 2003: 73-84). Besides the tribute of 10,000 guilders, he gave 3,000 guilders to the grand vizier Sokollı Mehmed Pasha, 1,000 guilders to Pertev pasha, 200 guilders to Piyâle pasha, and several hundred silver coins to other lower dignitaries, for example 20 silver coins to the famous dragoman Tercümân Murâd (Ocak, 2016: 55-56; Szilágy, 1876: 470-471). Without going into all the data from these lists, it is worth mentioning that in the case of Transylvania the most prominent gifts besides the sums of money were silver cups (Ocak, 2016: 55-56; 58, 61-62. Szalay, 1860: 114-115, 131, 197-198). According to the sources it is certain that the pîşkeş contained about 2,600-3,400 tallers, 23-31 gold and gilded silver cups, about ten of which were given to the sultan. In addition, they gave him silver washing cups with water jugs, and then later a clock. Rarely, the princes of Transylvania also sent a magnificent carriage with six horses and splendid harnesses. In the case of Transylvania, they also had to send falcons and hunting dogs to Istanbul (Bíró, 1921: 15-16). The Ottoman financial records contain some data about the Transylvanian pîşkeş, mentioning chalices of various sizes (kupa-i kebîr yedi, kupa-i sağır ‘aded üç [seven big cups, three little cups]), and also cash (kîse-i gurûş ‘aded yigirmi bir, kîse-i ... ‘aded üç [a purse with 21 tallers; a purse with ... three]) and falcons (şâhîn cenâh ‘aded altı [six falcons]).¹⁵ Sometimes short lists of pîşkeş could also be found in the Ottoman registers of ceremony (teşrifât defteri), like in case of the prince Gábor Bethlen (1613-1629), who sent 20 chalices and 12 falcons in the year 1618.¹⁶ Although the well-known Romanian Ottoman scholar, Aurel Decei, placed the value of the pîşkeş from the Romanian voivodships as almost the same as the tribute,¹⁷ I believe it was less according to the evidence from Transylvanian practice.

¹⁵ Arhivele Nationale ale României, Direcția Generală București, Microfilme Turcia, role 44. c. 260. (The original document should be in the Collection of the Topkapı Müzesi Arşivi in Istanbul.)

¹⁶ „Bu gün divân olub Erdel elçisi ziyâfet olunub tehiye-yi cülûs-i hümâyûna pîşkeşin çekmeyüb hemân şöyle-kim tehiden olmamak için gelen pîşkeşdür. Pîşkeş-i Betlengâbor hâkim-i vilâyet-i Erdel der-vakit bâ nâme-i hümâyûn bâ elçi-i Gâmût Farkaş, pîşkeş be-hem be hem ferestâd, behâr-i şogûfe-misâl-i gümüş kûpa kıt‘a yigirmi kıt‘adur: şâhîn cenâh on iki. [A divân was held this day. The Transylvanian ambassador was received. He did not bring a gift to the ceremony for the preparation of accession to throne, so no gift was given at this ceremony. The gift of the prince of the Transylvanians, Gábor Bethlen, which was delivered with the letter of the ruler through his ambassador, Farkas Kamuthy, and was 20 silver chalices ornamented with flower-buds and 12 falcons.] BOA Kâmil Kepeci, Teşrifât defteri Nr. 666. p. 151. 9. Cemâziyü l-âhir 1027 / 03 June 1618” (The text refers to the accession of Sultan II Osman (1618-1622) to the throne (6 February 1618).

¹⁷ “The gifts (pîshkesh) which the voyvode made to the sultan, the wazirs and other influential people became an established usage, and nearly equalled in amount the sum paid as kharâdj.” Decei and Inalcık, 1986.

It is obvious from the Ottoman documents that the *pîşkeş* was not as clearly regulated as the tribute. After examining these documents, one can conclude that the word *pîşkeş* can only be interpreted alongside an examination of the historical events.

An example is the appointment process for Zsigmond Báthory (1581-1601), whose father Kristóf Báthory (1576-1581)¹⁸ died in 1581. The Transylvanian estates had elected the underage Zsigmond to be voivode, and the result of the election was announced to the Porte. The reaction was quite reassuring, the kaimakam (deputy of the grand vizier) and the other pashas consented to the appointment. In the meantime, the grand vizier, Koca Sinan Pasha returned. He most likely had been paying greater attention to events on the international scene and put forward a rival in an effort to separate Transylvania and Poland. His candidate was Pál Márkházy, a Hungarian nobleman who first fled from Habsburg Hungary to Transylvania, and then had found asylum at the Porte a few years earlier. Márkházy's emergence as a possible voivode was related to his rather large offer of money to the grand vizier. The grand vizier proposed that the government of Transylvania should pay higher tributes, raising them from 15 thousand to 100 thousand forints, as well as a one-time gift of honour (*pîşkeş*) of 100 thousand forints. If the Transylvanians accepted this and delivered the sum to the Porte on behalf of the voivode's son, Zsigmond Báthory, the Ottoman government would accept the underage child as voivode, but if they rejected the offer, they would have to accept Márkházy as the new voivode. However, Transylvanians were confident that the grand vizier could not enforce his demands. Koca Sinan's position as grand vizier was uncertain, and his rivals at the Ottoman court were waiting for him to make a mistake so they could push him aside. In addition, support for the Polish king, István Báthory was also very strong in Istanbul because of his nephew. Although the documents for his appointment were issued at the Ottoman state chancellery, the grand vizier had to give up on the appointment of Márkházy to the Transylvanian throne. Shortly afterwards Sinan was deposed and Márkházy was captured. The demand for the gift of honour was only present in the diplomatic correspondence of the Ottoman officials. Documents that were very closely related to the appointment, such as the treaty document (*'ahdnâme-i hümayûn*) and the imperial letter (*nâme-i hümayûn*), do not contain a word about the *pîşkeş* (Papp, 2003: 97-99).

This story has general relevance because the pressure to make monetary promises to be appointed voivode became very common in Moldavia and Wallachia in the 17th and 18th centuries as well. Similar circumstances can be found in the despatch of the Habsburg envoy Casanova from November 1667, "The Porte confirmed the voivodes of Walachia and Moldavia in their countries after they had paid the sums

¹⁸ Brother of the king of Poland, István Báthory.

claimed from them. The [voivode] of Walachia, who is here [in Constantinople] also collected the money here and presented himself with great splendour in front of the sultan in that way, when he was coming back here from the hunt. The sultan praised him for his loyalty and encouraged him to continue on his journey and rewarded him with a kaftan. It seems necessary that both principalities will be completely destroyed because of the changes of princes, which take place in this way, and for the frequent demands for money.”¹⁹

A mention of *pîşkeş* in the documents from the sultan to the prince of Transylvania concerning the official transfer of power dates from the time of the Long Turkish War (1591/93-1606). The pro-Turkish princes, who wanted their country to stay neutral in the military conflict between the Ottomans and the Habsburgs by accepting the suzerainty of the Ottomans, were excused from paying tribute for a certain period of time, but they had to continue paying the gifts. András Báthory (1599) in 1599, Zsigmond Báthory in 1601 and then Mózes Székely (1602-1603) in 1603 were exempted from tribute. This method was again employed when the Transylvanians were militarily occupied by the Habsburgs in 1687. The Transylvanian envoys managed to manipulate the conditions of Ottoman sovereignty to avoid paying tribute for an unspecified period of time, but the delivery of gifts to Constantinople remained on the agenda, even though this was never again performed.²⁰

The gift of honour, as a duty to be paid to the Ottomans, can be found in the Ottoman treaty documents with Hungary and Transylvania related to when tax payments were suspended in any way or not introduced. At the beginning of 1621, a draft treaty was drawn up with the aim of subjugating and supporting the northern Hungarian counties in opposition to the Habsburgs. In this, the sultan guaranteed them self-government under the authority of the Transylvanian prince, Gábor Bethlen. Here the word *pîşkeş* has the meaning of the regular gift of honour, “*âsitâne-i hümâyûnuma bu sene pîşkeşlerin göndereler ki ben-dahi her vechle*

¹⁹ ÖStA HHStATürkei I. (Turcica) Karton 139 (1666.XI-1667. XII.) Konv. C. 1667 (Juni-Dezember un s.d.) fol. 140. 16 November 1667. Casanova from Constantinople. „Die wallachische und Moldauische Fürsten seindt durch erlegung der von ihnen begehrten Summen von der Porten in ihren Fürstenthumben bestätigt worden, der wallachische befindet sich alhier, sein theil geldt darzu zuversambeln, hat sich dem Sultan, alß selbiger von der iagt käme, in hicherweg mit grossem pracht praesentiert, dessen gehorsamb der Sultan gelobet, ihn ermahnet alßo weiter fortzufahren vnd ein Caftan verehret, mit disen so machenden verenderungen der fürsten, vnd deßwegen so offtmahligen geld forderungen, werden diese beyde fürstenthumber nothwendig gar ruiniert werden.”

²⁰ Arhivele Naşionale ale României, Direcţia Generală Bucureşti (ANR DG-Bucureşti) Doc. turc. XXIX/2362, Constantinople, 7 December 1687 / 1 Safer 1099; Guboglu, 1965: 197-198, Nr. 654; Gemil, 1984: 374-380. There are two copies of the agreement, but they are not identical word for word: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Handschriftensammlung H.O. 180. 6r-7r.; 8v.-10v.

düşmenlerden koruyub (their gift of honour for this year is sent to my grand lordly court, I will preserve them from their enemies in every way).²¹ A similar situation that should be mentioned is that the Ottoman dignitaries also referred to the sum of 200 thousand florins as a gift of honour because of the ratification of the peace treaty of Zsitvatorok (1606): “pîškeş ile gelüb ([the Habsburg envoy] should come with the gift of honour).”²²

The first mention in a treaty letter related to Transylvania that the gift of honour was also expected in addition to the regularly paid tribute was a diploma of appointment (*berât*) from the appointment of Catarina of Brandenburg (princess of Transylvania between 1629 and 1630). She married Prince Gábor Bethlen in 1626 with the intention of providing him an heir and establishing close relations through her father’s good family connections with the Protestant powers opposing the Habsburgs, such as England and Sweden. The prince wanted the sultan to confirm her as his successor as ruler of Transylvania while he was still alive (Kármán, 2015). After the wedding, Bethlen sent a ceremonial legation to Constantinople, and the princess gave a clock to the *kaimakam*.²³ Although news from the Ottoman capital arrived regularly in Vienna, no information is found about her confirmation. Since the war between Transylvania and the House of Habsburg had not only broken out but had even come to an end in the meantime due to covert Ottoman military aid, it probably no longer seemed particularly important for Catarina of Brandenburg to be confirmed by the Sultan as the heiress of Transylvania. However, a treaty document was drawn up at the beginning of February 1627, mentioning both the tribute and the gift of honour, “kadîmden mu’ayyin olub viregeldükleri haracların ve pîškeşlerin vakit u zemâniyle sâl be-sâl virüb bi-t-temâm ve-l- kelâm âsitâne-i se’âdetimüze irsâl u îsâl eyleye (The tribute and the gift of honour, which have been fixed and paid since a time long ago, shall be sent to my blessed court in due time and punctually every year genuinely in full, as before).”²⁴

Although the Hungarian and Transylvanian sources confirm that the Ottoman dignitaries always expected gifts for their help and assistance, the Turkish docu-

²¹ Ferîdûn, 1275²: 446-448; Gemil, 1984: 163-164 (Turkish text), 164-166 (Romanian translation). (Under incorrect date: July 1614); Panaite, 2000: 246; Kâtib Çelebi, 1286: 365-366; Na’imâ, 1283/1866: 134-136 (similar as by Kâtib Çelebi); Naïma, 2007: II, 419-420; Karáson, 1914: 198-200. Gemil, 1984: 164-166.

²² ÖStA HHStA Türkische Urkunde 20-29. 03. 1607.

²³ ÖStA HHStA Türkei I Staatsabteilungen (Turcica) Kart. 110 (1625-1626) Konv. D (1626 Juli-December u. sd.) fol. 14-16. 1626. 07. 10. Relation des Gesandten.

²⁴ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz I. (Berlin) Hauptabteilung, Geheimer Rat, Repositorium 11, Auswärtige Beziehungen, 255a Siebenbürgen nr. 3. vol. 3. Bl. 339-344, und fol. 345-347.; The Ottoman and German textual variants of Catherine of Brandenburg’s Diploma of appointment and imperial treaty document; Ferîdûn, 1275: II, 450-453. Szentkatolnai Bálint, 1875: 166-169 (incomplete translation from the collection of Ferîdûn); Literature: Ötvös, 1861-1862: II, 215-219.

ments show these regular demands only from the beginning of the 17th century. If the prince required something unusual, extra money had to be paid for it. Bethlen had offered a large sum of money in 1621, 200 thousand guilders, if the grand vizier would send him military assistance against Emperor Ferdinand II (Mikó, 1855: I, 359). For example, when princes wanted to confirm their successors to their thrones while they were still alive, they had to provide money to support their goal.

Prince György Rákóczi I not only wanted his son to be elected by the Transylvanian estates, but also to be confirmed by the sultan. A rather large sum had to be offered to the grand vizier for permission to have his son elected as prince, "... sana verdüğümüz pîşkeşden gayrî bu defa hizmet-i ihsân buyurulduğu birle hazır bin sîm guruş teslîm ederüz ve bundan ma'adâ Erdele vasıl olduğumuz birle se'âdetlü pâdişâh hazretlerine gelecek pîşkeş ile ma'an dahi nakîd bin gurûş ve ... koçî-i mükemmel rahtli ile ve atları ile gelir (We now give you, in return for your assistance a thousand silver tallers in addition to the gift of honour. Besides this, when we have arrived in Transylvania we shall send you a thousand tallers in cash together with the gift that is coming for the Padishah, ... and a magnificent carriage with harnesses and with horses will also go [to you] ...)." ²⁵

The prince had to pay the tribute and the gift of honour on time through his envoy.²⁶ However, this was only the beginning of the process for his son to be confirmed as prince. The Transylvanian legation offered 13,000 tallers for the appointment of the new prince, and shortly afterwards this sum rose to 32,000 tallers through the mediation of another envoy.²⁷ After the new prince had been elected, a new legation went to Constantinople so that the insignia and the diploma of appointment could be processed. The situation was very tense. If the prince agreed to pay the sum of money raised for his son's appointment, it would also be required for later appointments. No matter what, he did not want to satisfy the demand in cash, but through gifts, such as chalices, washing cups and a water jugs.²⁸ When the Transylvanians arrived in Constantinople, the Porte's interpreter, the previously mentioned Zülfikar Efendi, looked through the gifts and claimed that the weight of the gifts was less than the Transylvanians had agreed upon. The interpreter valued them at only 6 thousand tallers. The envoys had to negotiate with him until they found an acceptable solution. They concluded that the land of Transylvania did not have to pay any money to the sultan for the appointment and the demand

²⁵ TSMA E. 2878.

²⁶ TSMA E. 5542. Gemil, 1984: 241-243; Panaite, 2000: 386.

²⁷ The envoy of Trasylvania, Rác István to the Prince György Rákóczi I.: Szilády and Szilágyi, 1870 (henceforth: TMÁOT 3.) Constantinople, 26 March 1642.

²⁸ Instructions of the Prince György I Rákóczi to the envoys to the Porte: MNL OL, MKA, E190. 13. csomó, 2923. sz. Gyulaféhérvár, 5-7 April 1642.

for 15 thousand tallers was reduced to 8 thousand, but they had to give 500 tallers to Zülfikar Efendi for his mediation.²⁹

However, this solution was not yet final. The envoys requested that the grand vizier issue not only a confirmation for the new prince, but also an imperial treaty document (*'ahdnâme-i hümayûn*) concerning his government after the death of his father. The grand vizier researched earlier cases and made the decision that the issuance of an imperial treaty document before the death of the prince would not be legitimate according to law and custom (However, it can be seen from other cases that the confirmation of successors while the current prince was still alive was unusual, but not unprecedented). The envoys tried to resolve the issue with the help of Zülfikar Efendi, for which he was now offered 5 thousand tallers, but then the Ottoman demands rose again. In order for the imperial treaty document (*ahdnâme-i hümayûn*) to be issued, the Transylvanians had to give the grand vizier 13 thousand tallers, a washing cup, and some trifles to the other viziers.³⁰ At the end of the negotiations, there was great disappointment on the Transylvanian side. Despite all the offers, the grand vizier did not issue an imperial treaty document, but only a document of appointment (*berât-i hümayûn*). This diploma was similar in content and language to the documents by which the voivodes of Moldavia and Wallachia were appointed. The grand vizier promised that when the old prince died, the imperial treaty document would also be drawn up.³¹ In the document of appointment for Prince György II Rákóczi (1648-1660) the word *pîşkeş* is used – for the first time in this way – as a tool for the preliminary acceptance of the successor, “... baban ... elçisi ile mektûb ve pîşkeşi ve Erdel memleketine tabi ‘ üç millet ‘ayânı ademleri ve mahzarları gelüb (... with your father’s envoy arrived a letter and his gift of honour and the servants and petitions of the three nations belonging to the land of Transylvania).”³²

Two situations similar to the events mentioned above occurred in 1652 and 1684 and resulted in two more confirmations. The documents of appointment contain the same wording and show that the confirmation of the successors was impossible without a bribe.³³ According to the sources, it can be concluded that the real winner was the expatriate Zülfikar Efendi due to his position as mediator.

²⁹ Report of Mihály Maurer to the Prince György I Rákóczi Constantinople, 08 May 1642: TMÁOT 3, 102-103.

³⁰ Report of István Rác to the Prince György I Rákóczi, Constantinople, 19 May 1642: Szilágyi, 1883: 671.

³¹ Report of István Rác to the Prince György Rákóczi, Constantinople, 02 June 1642: Szilágyi, 1883: 674.

³² Feridûn, 1275: II, 470-471.

³³ Göttingen, Niedersächsische Nationalbibliothek, 4° Cod. MS. Turcica 29. fol. 96v.-97r. evâhiri Muharremü l-haram 1063 / 2-11 December 1652; Göttingen, Niedersächsische Nationalbibliothek, 4° Cod. MS. Turcica 30. fol. 77r-77v.; Veselá-Přenosiřová, 1965.

He played a major role in the corruption at the Ottoman Porte during this time and was a double agent who not only conducted his professional activities as an interpreter at the Porte between the Transylvanians and the Ottomans, but also handed over information to the Habsburgs in exchange for money. This sometimes even included letters that were entrusted to him to translate, e.g. from Hungarian into Turkish.³⁴

Conclusion

I believe that research in recent decades has shifted the deadlock in the study of gift-giving customs across the various eras of the Ottoman Empire, separating official and regular gifts from semi-official and illegal ones, specifically for the purpose of bribery. Nonetheless, from both the great historical chronicles and the royal mirrors, as well as lawsuits that appear rarely, it appears that corruption was perceived as a serious problem even by Ottoman authors. As can be seen, official documents primarily deal with gifts that were or could be officially accepted, regulating and demanding their delivery. At the same time, there is evidence of services being tied to informal deals, starting with the officials of the *dîvân*. Due to the nature of bribes and bribery, there are very few pieces of evidence showing proof, as is the case even today. Therefore, it is of great importance in European-Ottoman relations to use the materials of diplomatic reports, which can provide information on the corruption or lack of corruption in high court circles that is missing from other sources, even imperial chronicles. In this case, I do not share the view of historians that the use of Western sources is misleading because they did not understand the inner workings of the empire. I am in favor of their use but in all cases, they must be evaluated (where possible) according to the Ottoman circumstances, including the traditional redistribution structure of the Ottoman State, where the custom of donations differed from the European customs of various times.

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